

EFFECTIVE NEGOTIATIONS: MEASURING PARTICIPANT SATISFACTION

One of the surest ways we can improve collaborative problem solving and agreement building—and their outcomes— is by evaluating past processes. In keeping with the participant-driven nature of the work, one of the best sources of feedback is the people who sit at the negotiating table.

Here at the Montana Consensus Council, we took that simple premise and put it to the test in the form of a “scorecard” that measures participant satisfaction. The scorecard gives us a better understanding of how participants view the strengths and weaknesses of collaborative processes and whether their needs are being met. It also reveals whether facilitated negotiation as we practice it lives up to its billing as a fair, effective, efficient way to resolve public policy issues.

At the close of each collaborative process facilitated by the Council, we send a “participant satisfaction scorecard” to every participant and ask for his or her candid, confidential response. The scorecard is a list of 24 statements about the collaborative process and any outcome that resulted. For each statement, participants are asked to check a box indicating whether that aspect of the process is important or unimportant to them. They then circle a number on a Likert scale from 1 (completely disagree) to 7 (completely agree) that corresponds to their level of agreement with each statement.

Each statement is worded favorably, such as, “The process helped build trust among participants.” A score of 1, 2, or 3 in this case would indicate that trust was not built. A score of 5, 6, or 7 in this case would indicate that trust did develop and that the participant is satisfied—to a specified degree—with this aspect of the consensus process. A score of 4 would indicate “indifference” or neutrality, perhaps because that aspect is relatively unimportant to the participant or because it was not a prominent concern in that particular process.

The Likert scale allows us to tally the total and average scores for each participant and for the group as a whole. A total score of less than 96 (an average of 4 on the Likert scale) indicates general dissatisfaction, while a score of 97 or higher indicates general satisfaction. The highest possible score is 168 (an average score of 7.0). The higher the total or average score, the greater the level of satisfaction. When calculating average scores, we disregard non-responses. For example, if a participant circles a number for only 22 of the 24 statements, we divide his or her total score by 22.

We also grouped the criteria so that we can determine the degree of participant satisfaction with the outcome, working relationships, and the quality of the process.